

Watkins-Coleman House  
5 East Main Street  
Midway  
Wasatch County  
Utah

HABS No. U-54

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## WATKINS-COLEMAN HOUSE

Location: 5 East Main Street, Midway, Wasatch County, Utah.  
Latitude: 40° 30' 45" N Longitude: 111° 28' 16" W

Present Owner: Mrs. Lethe Tatge

Present Occupant: Mrs. Lethe Tatge

Present Use: Residence

Statement of Significance: This is one of the early polygamist adobe houses in Utah, maintained in excellent condition throughout its existence. Family home of former Senator Arthur V. Watkins of Utah.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

John Watkins  
Mary Ann Watkins, widow (1902)  
Henry T. Coleman, (1903)  
Mrs. Lethe Tatge (1948)

## 2. Date of erection: 1869

## 3. Architect: John Watkins

4. Builder, suppliers, etc.: John Watkins, masonry;  
Moroni Blood, carpentry; Henry Coleman Sr., planing;  
Joseph Kerby, painting.

## 5. Original plan and construction: The builder's daughter Mary A. Shaer, describes the house: "John Watkins did all interior decorating of his homes; the only exception being when our house was built. Joseph Kerby did the painting and varnishing. Father always did the paper hanging and remodeling if we needed any. The house had a large spacious cellar for the storing of vegetables and one room for the milk, butter and fruit. The house had a large dining room on the north. This was a spacious room with a long dining table in the center, the china cupboard, the organ, father's bookcase, the sewing, an upholstered sofa, rockers and dining chairs."

She continues, "There was a long, glassed-in kitchen on the west of this with a pantry on the north end. At the south a door led into Mother's bedroom. Next there was a large room in the center and front of the house which was used as the parlor and here was the best carpet, the choice furniture, pictures, and treasures. It was a beautiful large room with two sets of double French doors opening on the south porch. This room also had a door leading from Mother's bedroom, one into the dining room and one into the large front hall. The hall had a front door leading to the porch, one to the dining room and another into a large bedroom on the east. There was a winding stairway with a curving banister leading to a large hall and three upstairs bedrooms. The center room led out onto a balcony or porch. This room also had a door leading to a storeroom which was never finished, but was used as a catch all for unused articles and discarded band instruments. We children loved to delve into these things and play a few tunes on the horns when Father did not know we were into them. The downstairs floor of the front porch was finished with smooth red sandstone blocks and immense white sandstone blocks comprised the front stoop with white sandstone steps that led down into a lower level with sandstone pillars on each side. The east bedroom was used as a guest room and many of the church notables have slept in this room such as President George Q. Cannon, John Henry Smith, President Anthon H. Lund, Owen Woodruff, Francis M. Luman, and almost all the former apostles of the Church. They stayed here as Father was the Bishop and in the days of the horse and buggy it was often necessary to stay overnight. North of this room was a small room that led to the dining room and out on the back porch and into the provision basement. A closet from the front hall was used to store the large pickle barrel and generally a twenty gallon size barrel of honey and many other dainties.

Spacious lawns were on each side of the house. They were slightly raised and terraced above the center semicircle. In this center at one time there was a large sandstone fountain with a basin, but on account of water conditions, this was done away with and a pine tree was planted in its place. On the east side lawn is a pine tree which was planted while the house was being built and is the largest and oldest cultivated native pine in this section. Native pines and cedars adorn the west lawn. The lawns were a gathering place for all the young people of the town and many happy times were spent with groups in games of pomp, stealsticks, drop the handkerchief and many other games."

6. Alterations and additions: Kitchen moved to east room on first floor, just east of dining room. Porch on east closed in to become part of kitchen. Modern bathroom added on north side between dining room and kitchen.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

John Watkins was born April 13, 1834 in the village of Maidstone, Kent, England. He was the third son of Thomas and Sarah Watkins. Thomas was a promising architect, and gave John a thorough training in architecture and building.

John married Margaret Ackhurst from Faversham, England and on January 31, 1852 their first daughter, Elizabeth, was born at Maidstone. He worked in London as an architect in 1852, and that same year was converted to the Mormon Church. On October 29, 1854, their second child, John Thomas, was born and in 1856 the family migrated to the United States, arriving in Boston harbor on June 28, 1856. They went overland to Iowa City, Iowa and joined the Martin Company wagon train under the captaincy of Edward Martin and Daniel Tyler, in Nebraska. They arrived in Salt Lake City in November, 1856 and soon after moved to Provo, Utah.

John helped build the old Mormon Tabernacle in Provo (demolished 1919). He also designed and built Provo's first opera house (Cluff's Hall) in 1857. While in Provo he acquired two new wives, and in 1865 the family moved to Midway, settling first in the lower settlement on Snake Creek, then moving to the Fort (Midway) above. (Also an occupant of the fort at that time was Henry Coleman Sr. (1866)).

After the signing of a peace treaty with the Ute Indians in 1867, the settlers began to build outside the fort. Watkins secured two sites, one a block south and east of the fort, and the other a block east. On the first he built a rock home with three apartments for his families.

Mrs. Shaer describes the other site, on which the Watkins-Coleman house is built:

"The plot of ground that John Watkins had obtained on the main road a block east from the old fort was slightly higher than the road. With the help of his boys he began to grade and terrace it. The center section was graded to street level. Each side was terraced with rock to support the spacious lawns on each side. Native pine trees were brought from nearby canyons and planted to adorn the grounds."

She also describes the planting of the still existing pine tree on the east lawn at this time.

Watkins located a bed of white sandstone, and with his boys began to cut and saw the stone for "corners, steps and pillars." He located a red clay bed and started to make the bricks and burn them. He used the bricks to build the first brick house in Wasatch County. (Mrs. Tatge does not agree that the house is brick, but rather adobe. She has had several brickmakers from Provo, Utah attest to this during periods of replacement of deteriorated brickwork.)

About this time, Moroni Blood had erected a sawmill on Snake Creek, where he cut and planed the intricate moldings, cornices, posts according to Watkins' designs. Henry Coleman Sr. also started a sawmill higher up Snake Creek, where he made the lath, shingles, beams and rafters for Watkins' home. John Watkins completed the home and did most of the interior decoration, except for the "fancy" painting and varnishing done by Joseph Kerby.

Mrs. Schaer's account states that John Watkins took a contract with "the railroad being rushed to its completion to the Territory" at Green River (Wyoming) in 1869 to do masonry work. He was paid \$1,000.00 for his labors, and upon his return, she states, "Then he finished his home."

Others seeing his home gave him their building contracts and he subsequently built homes for George Bonner, Sr., William Bonner, George Bonner, Jr., William Coleman, and others in Provo and Springville. Arthur V. Watkins, former United States Senator from Utah, was a son of Arthur Watkins, Sr. and Emily Gerber. Arthur, Sr. was son of John Watkins and Harriet Steel. Senator Watkins was born in Midway on December 18, 1886, presumably in this house.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Interview with Lethe Tatge, daughter of Henry T. Coleman and present occupant. (See Section E, Supplemental Material)

2. Bibliography:

Daughters of Utah Pioneers. Under Wasatch Skies, A History of Wasatch County 1858-1900, The Deseret News Press, 1954.

Mortimer, William James. How Beautiful Upon the Mountains, Wasatch County Chapter, Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1963.

Shaer, Mary A. John Watkins, A Brief History of the Pioneer, (no date; privately published) c. 1952.

E. Supplemental Material:

Interview with Mrs. Lethe Tatge, July 5, 1968, present owner-occupant of Watkins' Coleman house and daughter of Henry T. Coleman. Mrs. Tatge is 75 years old.

John Watkins built the house in 1868. He was the architect, and grandfather of Senator Arthur V. Watkins of Utah. His widow (Mary Ann Watkins) sold home to Henry T. Coleman, Mrs. Tatge's father, in 1903. They permitted Mrs. Watkins to remain in the house through the winter to arrange her affairs, and did not move in until 1904.

The home was left to her and her husband (Francis C. Tatge) in 1948, when they lived in Chicago. They returned to Midway to care for her elderly parents and the property and have lived there since. The parents had continuously occupied the property since 1904. Henry T. Coleman died in 1952 and Mrs. Coleman passed away in 1961. Mr. Tatge, whose father was William Tatge, law partner of William Jennings Bryan, died in 1954.

Moroni Blood, a local carpenter, did the intricate scroll wood trim on the house.

Henry Coleman Sr., (Mrs. Tatge's grandfather) did the planing.

Interviewer: John L. Giusti

Prepared by John L. Giusti, AIA  
July 25, 1968

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest: Evidence of the amenity and ornament attained in a pioneer dwelling of adobe brick is found in this example of a polygamous house.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent; lovingly maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This two-story house with partial basement is rectangular, 46' 0 " x 41' 6".
2. Foundations: Pot-Rock
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Hand-pressed brick; white sandstone quoins. Brick painted red; quoins and trim painted white. (Old picture shows all brick joints painted white).
4. Structural system, framing: Masonry; some of floor framing is unsawn log.
5. Porches and stoops: Front porch recessed, 3 bays with original 3-bay rail above reduced to center bay. Original east porch closed in as kitchen shortly after 1900, c. 1904. Front porch floor now concrete; originally red sandstone slabs.
6. Chimneys: Two plain chimneys at rear. Two at front; double diagonal chimneys on rectangular base.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Front door - 4 panel, upper panel glass with segmental arch. Second story front door - gothic arch with glass; wood muntin tracery.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Two French doors into front parlor, 12 lights per leaf. Other original windows six-over-six double hung. Those at front now changed to two-over-two. Wood lintels slightly pitched like pediments. Louvered shutters not operable; added within past 20 years to lower bedroom windows only.
8. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gables and lean-tos; wood shingles; green stained.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: Extremely noteworthy lacy wood bargeboards.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Partial basement, original vegetable cellar. Symmetrical first floor provided equal bedrooms for the second and third polygamous wives of John Watkins. These were on either side of the front entrance and parlor. One step higher, the large dining room was behind the parlor. The original kitchen and pantry was just west of the big dining room; the porch, now the kitchen, just to the east. There are bedrooms over the three front rooms and an attic behind the center bedroom and three steps up.
2. Stairways: A rather steep stair with winders rises from the front hall. The newel is turned but the base is a crude assembly of rounded boards.
3. Flooring: Originally all wide pine boards; some replaced (living room and downstairs bedrooms).
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Wallpaper. Wood lath and plaster. Upstairs rooms were originally whitewashed.
5. Doorways and doors: Four-panel doors, some with original graining, in unornamented openings. Thresholds are evidence of unsawn (adzed) logs in construction.
6. Decorative features and trim: Mantels and stair rail of very simple (almost crude) design and workmanship. Panelled wainscot (30" in living room, 33" in parlor).
7. Notable hardware: Porcelain knobs, nothing pretentious.
8. Lighting, type of fixtures: Electric; upstairs fixtures date from installation of electricity. Stamped metal ceiling medallion in dining room was originally used for a hanging coal oil lamp.
9. Heating: Original mantels remain but fireplaces closed. Small cast iron stoves still operable in center and southeast upstairs bedrooms.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation: Faces Main Street to south; Center Street is at west.
2. Outbuildings: A number of small frame structures are old; original barn destroyed; new concrete block garage.



3. Landscaping and walks, enclosures: Sunken carriageway now a lawn. Large spruces transplanted by John Watkins from original forest locations. Crisscrossed with irrigation channels.

Prepared by Paul Goeldner, AIA  
Supervisory Architect  
Utah Project 1968  
July 5, 1968

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This record is part of a Utah Survey conducted in the summers of 1967 and 1968 under joint sponsorship of the Historic American Buildings Survey of the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation of the National Park Service and the Utah Heritage Foundation.

Field work, historic research and record drawings were done under the direction of Project Supervisor Paul Goeldner, AIA (Texas Tech University) assisted by Project Historian John L. Giusti, AIA (University of Utah). Photographs were made by P. Kent Fairbanks of Salt Lake City.

Student Assistant Architects on the 1967 team were Robert M. Swanson and Charles W. Barrow, (University of Texas) and Kenneth L. Lambert and Keith Sorenson, (University of Utah). 1968 Student Assistant Architects were Keith Sorenson, Charles D. Harker and Robert Schriever, (University of Utah) and Donald G. Prycer, (Texas A. & M. University).